

The Schools of Education Learning Collaborative Helps the University of Pittsburgh Determine Feasibility of Proposed Online Program

Challenge:

After the Provost at the University of Pittsburgh announced an initiative to promote online programming, the School of Education saw an opportunity to expand beyond its traditional student market. However it first needed to demonstrate the feasibility of an online program to secure funding.

Solution:

The Schools of Education Learning Collaborative (SOE-LC) research team conducted an online survey of more than 500 teachers in the region. Among the issues addressed by the survey were:

- What is the size of the potential target market for the program?
- What are the characteristics of this market?
- What are the educational needs and preferences of the potential target market?

Results:

Armed with the data uncovered in the research, the School of Education was able to successfully lobby for funding for program development. In addition, they will be able to use the insight generated from the study for future planning as they look to design and market the program.

About the University of Pittsburgh:

Location: Pittsburgh, PA

Carnegie Classification: Doctoral

Ownership: Public Institution

Size: 17,208 Undergraduate Students (2008)

About the Schools of Education Learning Collaborative:

(SOE-LC) helps deans and leaders within schools of education by providing data and insight to assist them in improving operational efficiencies, demonstrating accountability in a difficult policy environment, and developing and improving programs to meet the needs and interests of their current and potential students.

An Opportunity to Reach New Students

When the Provost at the University of Pittsburgh (Pitt) announced last year that he saw important opportunities for the University in online professional degree and certificate programming, the School of Education knew it wanted to be a part of this university-wide initiative to reach new students. Offering only graduate teacher certification, an online degree program would allow them to adapt to market changes and reach graduates of the more than 90 competitors offering undergraduate teaching certification in Pennsylvania.

To assist with this effort, Dr. Alan Lesgold, Dean of the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh, commissioned a Custom Research Report through the Eduventures Schools of Education Learning Collaborative (SOE-LC), to provide the framework and data needed to make the case to the Provost.

Identifying Market Demand and Characteristics

Custom Research Reports provide SOE-LC members with the opportunity to examine issues of concern to them; in this case, Pitt was interested in the feasibility of offering a high-quality online master's degree to teachers currently practicing in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia.

After working with Pitt to define the scope and goal for the project, the SOE-LC research team deployed a Web survey sent to more than 500 teachers in the region. In addition to an in-depth analysis of student interest and potential market size, the survey sought to uncover insight on the characteristics, motivations, preferences, and needs of prospective students, as well as assist the University of Pittsburgh in developing an online program that could deliver a high-quality learning experience to students.

Turning Insight into Action

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Dr. Alan Lesgold
Dean
School of Education
University of Pittsburgh

The research uncovered a high level of demand for master’s degree program in education delivered in or hybrid format. In fact, of the survey respondents are considering enrolling in a master’s degree over the next three years, 81% indicated an interest program with some online component, and 33% specified preference for a completely online program.

The research also indicated some challenges for Pitt as the survey found that there was a low level of familiarity with Pitt among prospective students in the region.

Securing Funding for Program Development

Initial response from the Provost was positive; in fact, after seeing just some of the data uncovered in Eduventures’ report, Pitt’s School of Education received additional funding to help with program development. Facing internal competition for funds, Pitt was able to use their membership in SOE-LC to gain the information they needed to make a compelling case for increased funding.

According to Dr. Lesgold, “Eduventures put us in a stronger position to gain access to these internal funds than other schools at Pitt; because we had more data to demonstrate an ROI, we were able to win the support we needed.” In addition, Pitt will be able to use the insight generated in the report for future planning as they look to design and market their online master’s degree program in education. As Dr. Lesgold stated, “Selling the program is not the hardest part of my job, it’s knowing how to run it. This report will allow us to make a fast transition from version 0 to version 1. Rather than making mistakes and going back and correcting them, we can get it right the first time.”

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